

Contact us with your
comments, ideas, or stories at:

This Way Out

c/o The Self-Education Foundation

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sara zia ebrahimi
emily nepon

this way out

how to get
out of
school and
on with
your life

a resource guide

Do you want to be in school? Do you think you have a choice?

What would keep you in school if you didn't want to be there?

Laws?

Dreams of college?

Fear of a lifetime of fast food work?

This society is addicted to school. We're addicted to doing things we hate because we think we have to get used to it. We're addicted to a high school-college-career model of success.

BUT WHAT IF WE TOLD YOU THAT YOU HAVE OTHER OPTIONS?

What if we told you that you could drop out of school and your life might even get better?

What if we told you that every day young people leave school for good and go on to learn anything they want, learn skills by doing them, start their own businesses, get good jobs, go to college, travel, and follow their passions? What if we told you that you don't have to be a rich kid with 100% supportive parents to jump off into the world of self-education?

Many thanks to: Alexis Buss, Matt Height, Pam Davis, April Rosenblum, Josh Marcus, Diane I. Fleming, Jamar Ralford, Steve Theberge, Caitlin Kiely, Katrina Hendry, and everyone else who helped make this pamphlet happen.

Teach Your Own, by John Holt. A homeschooling handbook. Offers good answers to the questions everyone always asks self-educators, like "what about socialization?" and so on. Unfortunately, Holt really had a focus on young children, but the book is still helpful.

Learning All The Time, by John Holt. This book demonstrates that children, without being coerced or manipulated, can and do pick up "the basics" from the world around them. Holt suggests simple ways anyone can give children the slight assistance they may need to learn reading, writing, math, science, and music.

A Sense of Self: Listening to Homeschooled Adolescent Girls, by Susannah Sheffer. This book suggests that the self-hatred that seems to accompany adolescent girlhood has more to do with the disrespect and disempowerment of schooling than with hormones.

Interesting History

Dumbing Us Down, by John Taylor Gatto. An easy read about the nasty history and trends of public school education.

A People's History of the United States, by Howard Zinn. History isn't really as boring as your 3rd period class made it out to be. This best-selling book gives a new look at American history.

A Primer on Libertarian Education, by Joel Spring. Here is the uncovered history of those who were opposed to education in the hands of the Government. Goes back to the 1700s!

Other Publications

Drop Out Magazine. 1114 21st, Sacramento, CA 95814. (916) 441-5526. Our favorite! A voice for young people who hate school, want to or have dropped out and what they do instead. Comes out roughly twice a year. \$1 for an issue, \$5 for a subscription.

Growing Without Schooling Magazine. 2269 Massachusetts Ave. Cambridge, MA 02140 (617) 864-3100. This magazine was started by John Holt over 20 years ago. A monthly magazine full of hands-on stories from and for homeschoolers and their families. Every January, GWS puts out a resource guide including local support groups, homeschool-friendly lawyers and other professionals and so on.

Life and Education, by Grace Llewellyn. The single most helpful book for people in school who want to get out of school. This book makes people feel like they can do anything. This is the number one book we would recommend to any school-aged person. Spectacular resource lists, too.

Freedom Challenge: African American Homeschoolers, by Grace Llewellyn. This book tackles the question of whether homeschooling is something only white people do. The resounding answer is No! Mostly interviews with homeschooling families, this book also has a great resource section at the end.

Real Lives: Eleven Teenagers Who Don't Go to School, by Grace Llewellyn. Detailed accounts of the actual experiences of homeschooled teenagers, including a resource list.

The Unschooling Handbook: How to Use the Whole World as Your Child's Classroom, by Mary Griffith. Unschooling "how-to"s with quotations from many unschooling parents. This book is aimed at parents but is probably helpful to kids and is pretty easy to find in the Free Library system.

The Handbook of Alternative Education, by Jerry Mintz. A geographic guide to the span of options outside of public school.

Criticism of School and How to Change Things

Deschooling Our Lives, edited by Matt Hern. Collection of essays, articles, and book excerpts published by authors in the self-education field.

How Children Fail, by John Holt. This classic book, which has deeply affected many people's lives, looks at what school is actually like for children and how much of what is done in school prevents, rather than encourages, real learning.

How Children Learn, by John Holt. This loving and insightful look at the way children learn challenges traditional assumptions and schooling methods.

Escape From Childhood, by John Holt. Youth rights! An examination of the way adults treat young people and common sense thinking about how young people should be treated.

What Do I Do Monday? by John Holt. Holt writes here about what is wrong with grading, what can help troubled children, and the difference between "teacher as cop" and "teacher as guide."

Freedom And Beyond, by John Holt. Many of the questions with which self-educators continually wrestle are addressed in this. What happens when people who are not used to making choices about their learning suddenly get this opportunity? Holt also writes about why schooling cannot cure poverty and what deschooling would mean for poor people.



Why did we put together this pamphlet?

Most of the information about high school drop outs focuses on the problems and failures of the individuals. But what about the problems with the schools? Who is discussing the damage that is done by staying in school? We wrote this pamphlet because we wanted to create a resource by young people, for young people that identifies schools *not* dropouts, as the failures with no future. We wanted to share the stories of a few of the amazing dropouts we know, to provide a reality-check for the lies we've all been fed by the school system and some inspiration for people to take control of their learning both in and out of school.

We didn't write this to encourage every student to drop out. It's a personal choice that takes a lot of thought. On the other hand, we want to make resources and information available so that leaving school is a real option for people who want it.

We hope that you'll write us back with your stories, questions and suggestions for how we could improve this resource guide.

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to go to college but can't stand high school take advantage of this program. Most colleges and universities have an early admission program. You should contact colleges you might be interested in and ask them about requirements. Usually you have to write extra essays about why you are ready for college.

This brings up another point about colleges in general: if you want to leave high school but think you won't ever be able to get into any colleges, a good way to deal with this is to call up colleges you like and ask them what they would suggest. They might tell you to stay in school, or they might tell you that they have a special admissions counselor to deal with homeschoolers. They might tell you that you'll need a portfolio or that you'll need to be able to prove that you've been studying a second language. You never know, it might not be as strict as you think.

You can find most colleges on the internet, and public libraries have big books with information on every single college in them. Ask your librarian for help finding colleges you're interested in and then call them with your questions about early admissions.

Websites

These sites are outstanding resources, offering booklists, quotes from Nobel prize winners who trash school, lots of website links to other people who are self-educated, discussion lists, resources by geography, and so on.

Against Compulsory Schooling

<http://www.youthpower.net>

http://infoshop.org/kidz/k_schools.html

<http://www.hsunderground.com/>

Student rights

<http://www.aclu.org/issues/student/hmes.html>

<http://www.aclu-wi.org/youth>

Self-educated teens on the net

<http://centauri.nbtsc.org/saor/unlist/>

<http://learninfreedom.org>

<http://www.midnightbeach.com/hs/>

Books

If you go to the library for books of this nature, they are generally classified 370 through 372 in the Dewey Decimal system, LA through LC in the Library of Congress system. You can always ask a librarian to help you out. We've found just browsing through the stacks in the education section to be very helpful. There are lots of books out there, but these are a few of our favorites.

Self-Education Resources

The Teenage Liberation Handbook: How to Quit School and Get a Real

can afford it, this is a great resource. Here is what their brochure says about Home Education: "Home Study with Upattinas School is individualized according to the needs of each family. We do not provide a standard curriculum nor do we administer correspondence courses. We are approved to proctor exams for Penn State's High School Extension courses. We can provide general guidelines and expectations based on state recommendations and from the perspective of Upattinas philosophy." You can also borrow books and materials from them, consult with them, find guidance about state requirements, and access their catalogue file. This would be a great resource for someone whose parents weren't quite sure and needed something to make them more comfortable with the idea of leaving school. This way you are still affiliated with a school, though not a public school.

Charter Schools

Philadelphia has several charter schools. The School District of Philadelphia has a website offering information about them at:

http://www.philsch.k12.pa.us/adm/charter_directory.html.

You can also find more information by writing:

Charter Schools Program, PA Dept. of Information

333 Market St., Harrisburg, PA 17126

or call (717) 705-2343.

You can also ask your school for information.

Charter schools in Philadelphia have a wide range of focus from Creative and Performing Arts to Mathematics, Science, and Technology, to focusing on speaking multiple languages, to Architectural Design, to Health and Human Services.

Here is one example of a charter school that might be just the thing for someone who wants to get out of school:

YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School

619 Catherine St., Philadelphia, PA 19147 (215) 627-8671

"YouthBuild is a 10-month construction training program that also offers paid work in housing renovation, classroom work towards high school, counseling/advocacy, training in community leadership, and placement in jobs or continuing education with successful completion of the program." Basically, unemployed dropouts ages 16-18 can do this program and learn skills, get a diploma, and help fix up abandoned rowhouses for sale to low-income families.

Early Admissions Programs At Colleges

Early admissions is a program which allows you to get accepted to college a year early and skip your senior year. Many people who would like



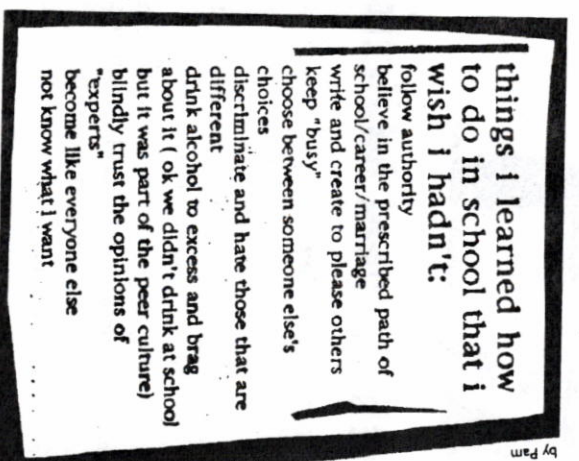
Understanding the School Addiction

Sara Zia's Introduction

Consider this idea: high school sucks. Even the most obedient and devoted students I've talked to, the ones who insist that they love school, will admit that they dislike having to get up so early in the morning, think most of the rules at their schools are unreasonable and find much of the information taught to them useless and irrelevant to their everyday lives. I think that when they say they love school what they are trying to say is that they love *learning*.

The problem is that some people mistake "learning" for "schooling" and think that the first cannot exist without the second. Yet we are born with a desire and motivation to learn. If you watch young children you will see that they are like little research scientists, constantly exploring the world around them and testing things for cause and effect. As we get older we are taught that learning is not about exploring things for ourselves but instead about performing tasks or exercises for adults. We have to go to schools where learning and understanding are no longer treated like internal motivation. Instead learning becomes an external demand that can only be given by someone older than us. Learning becomes something that can only happen behind closed schoolhouse doors roughly between the hours of 7:30am to 2:30pm and during our homework. Learning becomes something forced on us that we have no choice about or control over. Life and experiences outside of school are not given much significance or considered actual learning.

After years of this, we become used to the daily routine of school. We also become convinced that if someone quits school this almost certainly means that the person will be "dumb" and "uneducated" and will never be "successful" in life. It's not true that all learning requires schooling. There are all sorts of ideas like these in our society which people just assume are



true. If you take a moment to really examine these ideas you will often find that they are held up by nothing other than years of blind obedience and a lack of critical questioning. Seriously ask yourself: why can't you continue learning and do what you want in life if you quit school?

Why would someone leave school?

People leave school because for some reason it doesn't work for them. Some people leave school because school makes them feel like a failure. They become convinced that

they are inherently stupid and don't think that more years in school will help them to become smarter or better at getting good grades. Other people leave school because they don't like it and think they can find better ways to learn on their own. There are people, often labeled as having "learning disabilities", who leave because they can't learn in the limited environment that schools provide. Many women are forced to drop out due to pregnancy because compulsory attendance laws do not allow them the time they need to take care of themselves and their child. There are also people who leave school to avoid being brutalized by others, or even to avoid killing themselves. For example, for many people who don't fit traditional gender or sexuality roles, leaving school can be a matter of life or death. With the recent furor against the Littleton shootings, school authorities and other adults have cracked down on young people's freedom of expression in school. Some people are leaving school to avoid being harassed or arrested for their choice of clothes and musical taste.

Unfortunately, for people under 16 making your own decisions about your learning situation can be difficult. Until 16, schooling is mandatory unless your parents or other adults are supportive enough to officially register you with the school board as a homeschooler. You also must be at least 16 years old to get your GED. Some people choose to stick around in school until this age so that they can drop out legally, while others simply leave when they know that's what they need to do.

submit your portfolio to the school district. They probably won't read it. If you are in 3rd, 5th or 8th grade, you will have to take a standardized achievement test. Your scores will be included in the statistics of the scores for your grade. You do not have to score high on these tests. You are not in jeopardy of being forced to go back to school no matter how you do on the tests. Noone I talked to had ever heard of any negative outcomes of bad grades, and they had heard of homeschoolers who did badly on the tests.

PA Homeschoolers Association

Howard and Susan Richman
RR 2 Box 117
Kittanning, PA 16201
Web: www.pahomeschoolers.com
E-mail: richmans@pahomeschoolers.com (724) 783-6512

This group offers the very-helpful *Guide to Homeschooling Laws in PA*, and also offers a *Guide to PA Homeschoolers Diploma*.

PA Dept of Education Homeschool Liaison

Sarah Pearce, School Services Unit, PA Department of Education
(717) 783-9287

Department of Education, Department of School Services

(717) 787-4860

This is the number you should call if your school system is placing requirements on you that are not in the law.

The Valley Unschooled Network

Jolene and Charles Kiernan (610) 799-2742

West Philly Homeschoolers Support Group

Dolores Thornton (215) 747-0442

Secular/multicultural group. Meetings, fieldtrips, newsletter.

South Philly Homeschoolers Support Group

Pam Powles (215) 463-4441 or (215) 334-1282.

Center City PA Home Education Network Contact in Center City

Marion Cohen (215) 732-7723

Available to answer your questions about homeschooling

The PA Home Education Handbook: Using Your Educational Style in Complying with the Law. By Diana Baseman. To order this send \$18 to: Diana Baseman, 54 Fielding Ct., South Orange, NJ 07079.

Uppatinnas School and Resource Center

429 Greenridge Rd., Glenmoore PA 19134 tel: (610) 458-5138

"The whole world is your school. We are a part of that world."

Uppatinnas is an alternative school in Chester County that also offers homeschooling consultations. Uppatinnas costs money to attend, but if you

Pennsylvania Homeschooling Laws

Not going to school is legal in every single state in the U.S. Different states have different laws, though, and some states laws are easier than others. In PA, it's not too strict, but there are rules. Pennsylvania's homeschooling law is Act 169 of 1988.

First, you need to file a notarized affidavit (an official form that says you intend to homeschool) with your local school district. Most school districts have the form you fill out and if you have any problem with that avenue you can find the form in any of the "Homeschooling in PA" resources we've listed. For this step you need a "supervisor" who has a high school education and has not been convicted of a "heinous crime" in the last five years. Second, you probably need a health certificate (meaning a doctor check up). Third, you need a list of objectives: how you intend to homeschool. An example of an objective might be "Johnny will study English by reading multiple books by a selected author." These are usually about two pages long and they can be as vague or as specific as you want. It is an outline of how you plan to learn. It's important to remember that in PA you DO NOT have to use a curriculum, and once you write up the objectives you are done with this part of dealing with the administration. The administration legally should not do any more than this. By law, they should not try to approve or disapprove of your objectives. You have to turn in an affidavit and your objectives every single year that you wish to homeschool. We have heard the advice that you should mail anything to the school district as certified mail, return receipt requested. Your receipt from the post office is proof that you did what you are legally required to do. You probably won't hear back from the school district. Keep a copy of anything you send them for yourself.

The next step of being a homeschooler is that by law you have to log your "learning time" by either (900) hours or (180) days. Of course, you can make up a good deal of this because as most self-educators would attest we are learning all the time. You also have to keep a list of materials and resources you used (like the books you read). You collect all the lists and samples of your work and at the end of the year (every July, to be exact) you are evaluated by a person of your choice. Evaluators must be a non-public school teacher, a PA Certified teacher, or a licensed psychologist. The PA Homeschoolers Association provides a list of helpful evaluators every year. You bring the evaluator a "portfolio" scrapbook of your learning. The point is to show that progress has taken place. The evaluator will interview you and write an evaluation saying that you have had an "appropriate education" and submit it to the school district. You can even write the evaluation yourself, type it up, and hand it to them to sign. You are also expected to

Concerns about quitting school

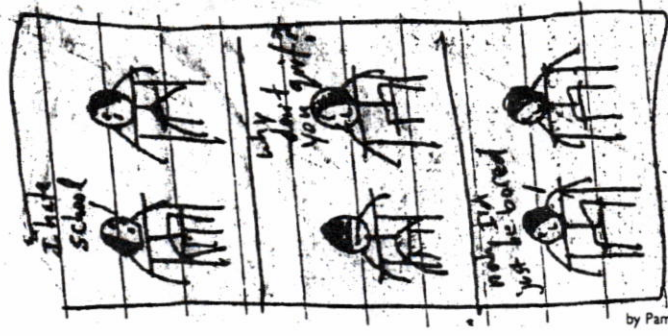
I'm scared that I'm too lazy

It's a common fear that without a rigid structure like school, we would never do anything with our lives. The evidence people use against themselves is the fact that every time they have a vacation they are not motivated to do anything but just sit around and sleep. Vacations and time off, however, are not necessarily evidence of what your behavior or motivation might be like without school. This brings us to another myth that is popular in our society: human beings are inherently lazy and unruly. According to this myth, for the "good of society", we must be forced to go to school and work.

We can't really know what we would be like without school with only our schooled selves as examples, especially after years of having our concepts of learning and motivation whipped and molded. If animals which have been caged up for most of their lives are briefly allowed freedom (or at least a larger fenced-in area) we cannot say that their behavior in that moment is representative of their true nature. Likewise, we cannot say that our behavior in our brief moments of freedom from work or school are any evidence of our true nature.

The schooling experience trains us to be spoon-fed. We wait for someone to feed us preprocessed information and we become less capable of finding that food (knowledge) for ourselves. When people leave school they often need quite a while of downtime, "not doing anything", waiting for directions. But, eventually the school-addiction dies down and original thoughts, inner passions and self-motivated learning find their space again.

What most of us do know, or at least have a pretty good sense of, is how we learn best. This is very personal, something you figure out for yourself. Some people learn better by hearing than by reading, for example. Some people want structure, some people cringe at the hint of a rule. The most important thing is that you should be able to choose. Some people choose to formally homeschool, some choose to study with other high school dropouts. Others find they learn better from everyday experiences like jobs and internships. And others prefer to read books on their own in their rooms.



But won't people think I'm stupid if I quit school?

It's true, most dropouts have to worry about what their peers, teachers and family will think of them after they quit school. Often the reactions of these people can make dropping out much more difficult and make someone feel even more like a failure.

Despite how some people may try to make you feel, you're not stupid for taking the initiative to control and shape your own life and education! In fact, it takes a lot more strength and thought to figure out what you really want to do with your life than it would to just "hang on" until the unpleasant experience of high school is over. Unfortunately, lots of people are threatened by this idea. If they had to go to school, why shouldn't you? If no one had to go to school, people might actually start doing what they really wanted with their lives, and the unfounded authority and control of those in power might start to collapse. The real question is, who defines what it means to be smart and what it means to be stupid? Who defines what intelligence is? There is knowledge that you can't get from schooling that only comes from human experience and development. School doesn't really teach you to solve real problems or think creatively outside of established boundaries. Some might even say it stifles our innate ability to do these things. School can't teach you something that hasn't been thought of yet. School can't teach you to be a good writer. You can learn grammar and punctuation, and you can be exposed to some really good books (that religious fundamentalists and government officials don't object to) but you can't gain the individual vision and life experiences that it takes to become a thoughtful writer. You can't learn to be an artist; all you can do is study other good artists and try not to reproduce their styles.

Even if you're not so sure how to take your education into your own hands, know this: you are not alone, you are not crazy, and you are definitely not stupid because you feel failed by school. Because of our society's limited conceptions of learning and intelligence, most people underestimate the value of everyday experiences and the knowledge we gain from them. If you are really interested in mechanics or in art or something else generally looked upon as being for "less intelligent" people, you should not be discouraged by these unfortunate misconceptions. Find ways that you can learn and pursue your desires.



Getting Your GED

One option for people trying to get out of school is to take the General Education Development Test. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, "GED tests differ somewhat from usual school achievement tests. In a regular school test there is likely to be more detailed coverage of facts to be learned from reference books, textbooks, and planned lesson presentations. GED tests allow people to use knowledge they acquire from firsthand observation, experience, reading, self-directed study, conversations, informal discussions and just living with problems, ideas and other people."

With the exception of the Writing Skills section, the test is multiple choice. It is divided into different sections: writing skills, social studies, science, interpreting literature and the arts and mathematics.

In the state of Pennsylvania, anyone over the age of 18 who is not enrolled in an approved or licensed school is eligible to take the test. People between the ages of 16 and 18 are eligible under the following circumstances:

- at the written request of an employer who requires a high school equivalency for job opportunities;
- at the written request of a college, technical trade school or university official who accept applicants on the basis of GED test scores;
- at the written request of a recruiting officer for persons wishing to enter a branch of the armed forces; and
- at the written request of the director of a state institution for residents, patients, or inmates before their anticipated release or discharge from the institution.

There are 79 testing sites in Pennsylvania. To get more information and a list of the testing center locations: Pennsylvania Department of Education, 333 Market St., 12th floor, Harrisburg, PA 17126, tel: (717) 787-6747. Test fees are established by each testing center and range from \$25 to \$45.

Here are two community services which provide GED classes (there are several others in the area):

Aspira, Inc. (215) 739-7488. 2726 N. 6th St. Aspira is an educational center providing GED, ESL, computer classes and help with financial aid papers.

Philadelphia OIC, Youth Advocacy Program. 215-236-1800. Philly OIC offers GED and Adult Basic Education classes. They also provide after-care services for kids coming out of state programs, providing liaisons to courts, family counseling, and employment resources. Philly OIC has been in existence since 1974.

Resource Guide

Much of this information is specific to the state of Pennsylvania and particularly to the city of Philadelphia. You can find information about the laws in your state concerning GED testing, home schooling laws, or charter schools by calling your local county school board or the Department Of Education, which is located in the capital city of each state.

Of course, this is not a complete listing of resources for the Philadelphia area. We just want to show some of the resources available and how one might find more of them.

If You're Still In School Know Your Rights and Resources!

The Philadelphia Student Union. (215)546-3290. Meets at 1315 Spruce St. The Student Union is an organization founded and run by public high school students dedicated to fighting for high quality education. The core of the union is four weekly leadership development programs that teach young people community organizing skills and help them develop critical analysis of their schools and neighborhoods. Students in this program organize campaigns to create real changes in their schools and to fight for adequate funding for their school districts.

ACLU: Know Your Rights In School. (215) 595-1513 extension 222. PO Box 1161, Philadelphia PA 19105. Email address: aclupubed@aol.com The ACLU of Philadelphia puts out a pamphlet on students' rights in schools which is very helpful (and free!) for any student in a public school. There is also a number that you can call if you feel your rights are being violated in school. They can give you advice, help you find a way to deal with a situation, and even help you fight for your rights in school. The ACLU is working to set up a peer education program about student rights in school.

Youth United for Change (YUC). (215) 423-9588. 2801 Frankford Ave. Rm 111. 19103. YUC organizes high school students in Philadelphia to work on education reform issues in school. YUC works toward youth leadership development, including skills like public speaking and negotiating. If you are a student at Strawberry Mansion, Edison, Olney, or Kensington, you can give YUC a call and work to make your school better.

Youth Services of Congreso de Latinos Unidos. (215) 229-4040. Services for the Latino community. Works with kids that aren't attending school, help dealing with truancy court. They also provide counseling for kids with minor crimes.

But dropouts can't get (good) jobs!

Well, to be honest, it's hard for anyone to get a good job, particularly these days. The economy is much different than it was for our parents when they were (or weren't) graduating from high school. More and more major companies are downsizing, offering fewer jobs at less pay and no benefits, while the owners and executives reap larger profits. Temp agencies are currently the largest employers in the country! Unless people go into a field like computers or engineering, even college graduates these days find themselves working low-paying jobs that have little to do with their degrees in order to pay off thousands of dollars in student loans.

Here's what a high school degree offers to the job market: almost nothing. You can lie on a job application and say you have one, say you're a homeschooler (which sounds more professional than dropout for some reason), or get a GED. Some places actually prefer a GED to a high school degree because they claim that, while people can graduate high school illiterate and unskilled, a GED at least shows a certain amount of ability.

What's often most important in getting a good job is not formal education, but networking. The college experience provides the time and the people to network with, the ability to start at a beginning level in a field without the reality of getting the lowest level of pay, and a degree. Without the degree, in our experience, that networking has to be more purposeful and we have to deal with lower pay in order to learn in the areas we're interested in, and pay the bills.

But school is the great equalizer!

It's a common misconception that school creates equality by offering equal education and opportunities. The reality is that this is far from the truth. If compulsory public school was the great equalizer then after over 100 years of it we wouldn't have to deal with problems like vast differences in the budgets of school districts, racism, the rape and abuse of women, women making only 70 cents to a man's dollar, police brutality, hate crimes, homophobia, lack of civil rights or protection for transgender people, homelessness, poverty... you get the idea. The public school system is far from being any kind of equalizer.

It promotes competitiveness and hierarchy through tracking programs, tests, and grades, perpetuates gender roles and racist stereotypes and unquestionably praises the superiority of the West over the rest of the world.



This, however, should not come as a surprise since compulsory schooling was never really meant to be a great equalizer. If you look at the original documents of the compulsory school system, such as Horace Mann, you will find that his vision for schooling was intended to fix the same problems it still attempts to fix today: the failure of parents to instill "proper morals" in their children and juvenile crime. Compulsory schooling is based on the concept that children belong to the government. Douglas Murphy, the founder of the North Carolina school system wrote, "...in these schools the precepts of morality and religion should be inculcated [laugh], and habits of subordination and obedience formed... Their parents know not how to instruct them... The State, in the warmth of her affection and solicitude for their welfare must take charge of these children and place them in school where their minds can be enlightened and their hearts can be trained in virtue."

Another example of the theories that have shaped education is that of H. H. Goddard, former head of psychology at the University of Princeton, who stated that the use of standardized testing in schools can be utilized as a method of social control to determine who should have jobs and children. In his book *Human Proficiency*, Goddard wrote, "[Standardized testing] is a way to make lower classes realize their inferiority and stop breeding."

The critics of compulsory schooling have been written out of history because the only people who wrote books on education theory were people in the education industry. But throughout history people have questioned compulsory schooling, schooling in the control of government, and our concepts of learning and intelligence. In the past forty years education reform has become a major issue, homeschooling has been legalized in every state, and several more schooling options have been created.

The 1960's and 1970's produced a movement of teachers who tried new ideas in their classrooms and others who left traditional schooling behind in search of a better answer. Since that time, an increasing number of people who see the problems with the authoritarian nature of school have become teachers in an effort to try to make learning a better experience for their students. Unfortunately, school systems and their rules can cripple the imaginations and good intentions of everyone involved in the process. Idealistic teachers often face the reality of having to conform to out-dated and uninspiring methods if they want any kind of job security. Teachers face limitations placed on them by the administration, lack of resources, small salaries, and class size overload. It's no surprise that many teachers become burned out and lose sight of their original goals. Because of problems like these, most schools still carry out the original ideals of a formalized school system by instilling obedience and subordination in America's youth.

activism. I wouldn't have the time, the energy and probably not the enthusiasm. I would just feel so drained. That's my experience - I know there are people who have positive experiences.

This Fall [1998] I'm going to be apprenticing with a potter, and there's no way I'd be able to do that if I was finishing my senior year of high school. I'm able to do what I want with my life now, I'm starting training and skill-gathering now. And if that changes, I have more time to pursue whatever else I'm interested in. Also, it gives you a chance to break out of this high school, college, career plan and really think about things you want to do.

Caitlin: My life has changed so much, mostly because I moved out of my parents' house. I really like school, I like learning in groups. I like being able to talk about things with other people and so that wasn't what was hard for me. I have compatible learning styles with the learning styles that are predominantly used in schools. So school was never a struggle in that way. It was that they were almost literally telling me every day: "No choice over your own life!" And that's the way my life has improved. I feel like I can choose what I want to be doing. That's changed everything about my life. It's also made me excited to learn. I felt like when I was in school I was like, "Oh, god we're studying the French Revolution again" but now it's like "The French Revolution! That's the most exciting thing I've ever read about! I could read about it for the next three years!" Quitting school made me excited about learning, and that's the best gift you can get, I think. It also made me excited about thinking critically about things.

If you knew someone was thinking about dropping out of high school, what would you say to them? What advice would you give?

Caitlin: I feel like it's a complicated decision. I can't really give any kind of general statement. I think for some people it wouldn't be right. I don't know. Steve: That's what I would say, too. You should really think about it strongly, and for a long time before you do it and figure out if it really is the best thing for you at that point in your life. My situation was a unique one, and I took advantage of resources that I had. It's not going to be as easy for most people as it was for me because of the amount of support I had and the area I live in. Resources and support are so important.



**While cutting a class,
Caitlin discovers free will.**

but that I *had* to be there. That's why I dropped out really. School was this thing I had to do, and if I had something better to do I had no choice. I was already politically active at the time, and I remember there was this big protest at UMass where student groups took over a building for a week—and that's what I wanted to be doing that week. But, no, I was stuck in high school, and if I left too often I'd get in trouble for it. I think I was also ready to be more adventurous.

What was difficult for you about quitting high school? What was easier than you thought it would be? What did you do with your new "free time"? Steve: I tried to do "school" outside of school for about 4 or 5 months. I had tutors for things like biology and math. I tried to set up something like I would be doing if I had continued the rest of my year at high school. I was real paranoid that I was going to fall behind everyone. That changed later.

For me, dropping out wasn't that hard really. I was lucky because I had a lot of resources, so it wasn't like I just dropped into some vacuum. I had a whole support network set up. I think the difficult thing was having this feeling of "I'm not doing anything with my life." That was the hardest part. That feeling stayed with me for years.

Something that was easier than I thought was the social aspect—partly because there was a homeschool community around me.

Caitlin: Like I said, I went to this art school. It was a charter school, which means that it has to offer something special that a regular school doesn't offer. And it's free, which is great. It also was supposed to act like a model for all the other public schools in the state if it worked out well. So I thought that maybe I could work on making this school great and help change the school system in Massachusetts. That made the decision to drop out a hard one to make. I mean, could I have done something really amazing and totally changed the way the school was going? It was also a difficult decision because my parents can't pay for me to go to college. I knew that I could do really well in high school and get good scholarships to go to college.

I also moved out of my parents' house after I dropped out, and that was a big change. Now, I feel like I have more options in my life, that I don't have to do high school, college, career. Because that's not what I want from my life anyway.

How has your life changed or improved since you dropped out of school?

Steve: I actually feel like I'm living now! That's the biggest change. I can pursue what I want to do with my life now instead of waiting to finish arbitrary classes. I can make my own decisions based on what I think I should do as opposed to doing what's required of me. I definitely think I would not be able to be as involved as I am in social justice movement

How dare you tell people to drop out!

Emily's story

When I was a homeschooler, up until I was 10 years old, I was pretty sure that school was the wrong answer for young people. It seemed like a bizarre daily reality that I couldn't believe anyone accepted. Then I went to public school for six years and I didn't realize that I could drop out. Why? I'd been out of school until 6th grade but once I got on the hamster wheel it didn't occur to me that the answer to my internal torture and ever-increasing self-hatred and alienation would be to leave. Well, I figured out that I could leave a year early and go to an alternative college. I hoped that would solve the problem of hating my life in school but it was like putting a band-aid on a deep cut. It made me feel a little better but the problem was still there. After I dropped out of college I felt so free that I wanted to tell everyone to join me. Why did I subject myself to those 6 mind-numbing years of middle and high school? I wanted to let everyone know that they had the option to leave too, assuming naively that they would immediately run for any open doors.

I no longer make a habit out of telling people that they should drop out. I make exceptions for people who I think might just be waiting for someone to say it to them but in general I've realized that there are a lot of good reasons why people stay in school. Here are a few:

- a lot of people don't have the kind of relationships with their parents that would allow such options as homeschooling or home-based self-educating;
- a lot of people have already got one hell of a struggle ahead of them based on their skin color, parents' income (or lack of), sexual orientation, etc. and don't feel like stepping down any more rungs on this society's ladder;
- many people live in areas where they don't feel like they have many resources;
- sometimes people really do need or like the structure of school;
- if you stay in school you can organize young people from the inside, and possibly change things or at least make people think;
- sometimes there are options within a school district that let you get a diploma but have a less miserable experience.

10% Education



40% Trivia
50% Indoctrination

Dispelling the Myth of the Unemployed Dropout

An Interview with Diane Imelda Fleming

Diane I. Fleming, 34, grew up in Philadelphia. She is an artist, a free thinker, and an administrator at the Family Planning Council. This interview was done over a delicious Indian meal in the Summer of 1999.

Where did you go to high school? How old were you when you dropped out? What was going on in your life that led you to make that decision?

I went to both Catholic and public schools. I had already moved 18 times by the time I reached high school, so I was sometimes going to about two or three schools a year. I went to four high schools until 11th grade when I decided that I wanted to drop out of Catholic School. I have a lot of biases against Catholic School education, but the one thing I don't have a problem with is the way they beat the English language into my brain which helped me be able to function in the real world. It enabled me to do things like fill out a job application. That part of my education was okay, but scrap the rest of it.

For me it was a lot of moving around and my family situation, which was not great, that made me realize that I'd be better off working and trying to get my own life together. I simultaneously dropped out of school and moved out of my parents' house. I had to start supporting myself, and working was the only way I knew how to do it.

Like a lot of other people who drop out, I started out by doing the playing hookie thing, cutting class when there were tests and eventually I just stopped going. I felt a lot of pressure in school to perform. I was in the first track for most of my classes. They would divide us into groups, the intermediate, the people who did more work, which was the first track, and then the lower level which was for people who were supposedly "special ed." The division always shocked me, because I was a total burnout in high school. I was smoking major amounts of pot on the charter bus on the way to school, but still pretty much doing okay. I think, though, that it really was the pressure of having to keep up with home and school and the family pressures that were happening that made me finally decide to leave.

What are some of the things you didn't like about school?

I think it was the social structure of school and the fact that there were so many cliques. There were so many people that I just couldn't relate to. You know, I come from a very low income background, and for the most part the people I went to school with were affluent. I never had that real

Taking Your Life Into Your Own Hands

An interview with Caitlin Kiely and Steve Theberge

Caitlin, 18, and Steve, 18, both grew up in Amherst, MA. Caitlin is currently traveling, working, playing, meditating, and doing youth organizing against injustice in the prison system. Steve lives in the Amherst area, where he is a potter and is involved in various activities including a books-to-prisoners project. This Fall Steve went to a Zapatista encampment in Chiapas, Mexico. This interview was done in the Summer of 1998 on a back porch in West Philly.

How old were you when you quit high school? What kinds of things bothered you about school that made you think about quitting?

Steve: I dropped out when I was 16 in the middle of my junior year. I had thought about quitting before that, but I thought I'd try to stay in school a bit longer. So I spent that Fall pretending I liked high school and then quickly coming to the conclusion that I actually hated it.

Basically I just said, "Fuck this, I'm leaving!" and dropped out. It's not like I dropped out without any kind of support system, though. My parents were actually supportive. Also, there's this place in Amherst called the Pathfinder Learning Center, which is a homeschooling resource center. I had been talking to people there for a while and they gave me a lot of support. So I stopped going to school and spent a few weeks "deschooling" and relaxing.

Caitlin: I was also 16 when I left school, but I didn't leave in the middle of the year. I finished my sophomore year of high school and then just didn't go back the next Fall. Half-way into my sophomore year, I had realized that

dropping out was an option. Steve was a good friend of mine, this woman Marta—I knew a lot of high school dropouts who are really amazing people. I think what made the situation worse for me in a way was that I was going to this alternative high school and pretending that it was okay, thinking "Oh, they have good art classes." But really, it was like a normal high school where you're caught up in this bureaucratic bullshit. I think the real reason why I dropped out was because I felt like crying every day I was there. It wasn't so much that I didn't enjoy what they were teaching me, or I didn't like the other kids, or that I had problems at home. It's just that every day they made me feel like I wasn't choosing to be there.



months before I turned 16, I don't remember ever leaving the house. I got more and more depressed. I went to adult education for a while after I dropped out, but that was worse than high school. Then I got my GED. You have to be 18 to get your GED in Florida too, so I had to petition to get special permission. Finally, about 6 months after I dropped out, I just stopped being the way I had been emotionally. I guess I felt a lot better about myself after I got my GED, though I still felt like it wasn't as good as a regular diploma. I did all the usual high school stuff, I went to prom and homecoming with my girlfriend. My friends got my picture in their senior profile thing, even though it wasn't my senior year (I would have been a junior).

Eventually my whole life got easier. I was learning on my own. In the time when I wasn't leaving the house I must have read like 100 books or so, and then I just started getting better and better, emotionally and physically. I was glad not to have deal with all the limitations that high school places on a young mind. I was proud that I was different than everyone else.

I started going to community college after I got my GED. Since then, my goals have changed. I'm 23 now and in culinary school. I can't believe it! I plan on more school after I graduate soon. But I didn't start to take things seriously in my life like this until after I got the chip off my shoulder about being dumb and being a dropout.

What would you say to someone who was thinking of dropping out of high school?

I would tell them the same thing I would tell someone thinking of quitting a job, because they are the same thing basically. I would say that you should consider your options, find something better, and then quit, unless you feel like you're in danger. I would say, go, and never look back.

You don't have to finish high school to go on and do well with your life, you really don't. I've encountered plenty of extremely successful people that are high school dropouts. You just have to want something bad enough that you are willing to work for it. You have to have goals and vision. They can even be everyday goals, like getting out of bed. You just have to say to yourself "I am smart and good and I can do anything!"

Sometimes if you are working outside of the tradition it might take longer than it would have originally, but that's life. You have to roll with the punches. If anything is really worth it, it means there is hard work involved. Don't be afraid to be different than the things presented to you by mainstream America.

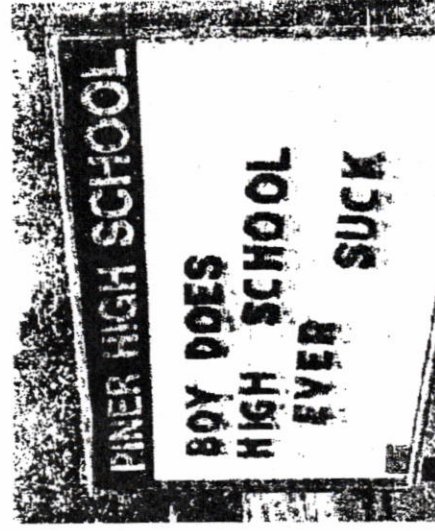
connection with them. Although that seems like something that should not be important and shouldn't matter, I felt like it mattered to them a lot more than it mattered to me. I tried to take people at face value and be nice even when they were being mean and cruel. There was a lot of cruelty in school, both in public and Catholic school. I will never deny that. At least in public school I was with more low income people and had an easier time, but it was the fighting that really got to me. I still have scars and lead in my wrists from as early as 3rd grade. It was constant. I went to John Bartram Public High for a short time. I remember our neighborhood was really racially charged and very tense. There were police on every single corner on the way to school to keep the race wars from happening. Also, on the inside of the school there were police all over the place

What was the most difficult thing about dropping out for you?

I think it was that I didn't expect so much stigma from my friends. The ones that did stay in school were like "Oh, you shouldn't do that" and many even stopped talking to me. It just made me feel more ostracized when I thought I was doing something that would help me, that would be beneficial for my life in particular. I lost a lot of friends in the process of dropping out, but I made different kinds of friends afterwards. I learned that the friends that stuck by me and my decisions were my true friends.

Is there anything that you thought would be difficult after dropping out that ending up being much easier than you expected?

I think that finding a job was relatively easy for me. You have to work on what your best skills are. You just have to find your niche. If you're not a



people person, try to find a job that's more behind the scenes where you don't have to deal with people. If you know that you have a particular talent you really have to work with that.

What's been important for me is volunteering. I've basically built my whole career by starting out volunteering somewhere and then working myself into a positions that I would have had absolutely no skills or background for. Being a volunteer at particular organizations that you have an interest in, you can really get around that and learn skills from the inside. Then you can take those skills further to be able to get yourself a job. It does not have to be an organization that you volunteer for either. It can be for anything or anyone you care about.

One of the most common concerns and misconceptions about people who drop out is that they won't be able to get a good job. How does your life show that this is not necessarily true?

I don't have a high school diploma or a college degree, though I do have a GED. I have six college credits to my name. I'm 34 years old and I'm working at a job where they're hiring people with Masters Degrees for similar positions.

I think you shouldn't ever undervalue experiential learning. Any type of interaction that you've had that is pleasing to you can somehow be turned into something that you enjoy. For years, I was a waitress, I cleaned toilets, I basically did anything I could to support myself while I was volunteering. I started volunteering at Planned Parenthood. I originally started there as a patient when I was 16 years old and started to get really pissed off when I was about 20. I was being yelled at by protesters that I was a murderer every time I went in to get birth control pills. So, I started helping out by being an escort and helping bring patients into the building. I did that for about a year and a half. When you volunteer places, you get yourself on the inside. You get to see job postings, you get to know people who are doing something that might interest you. I would just start to ask people questions and they would say "Oh, well maybe you should read this book about it" or "Maybe you should come to this meeting" or tell me about another group I should check out.

That's the other important thing, you have to network! Because I had networked it was never a problem when I filled out a job application there that I didn't have a high school diploma or college degree. I usually knew the person interviewing me by then. You just need to show an inclination and a willingness to learn. You need to have put forth some sort of effort that makes you stand out. Even if someone else comes in to apply for the same job and they have a degree, because you put forth the effort to get

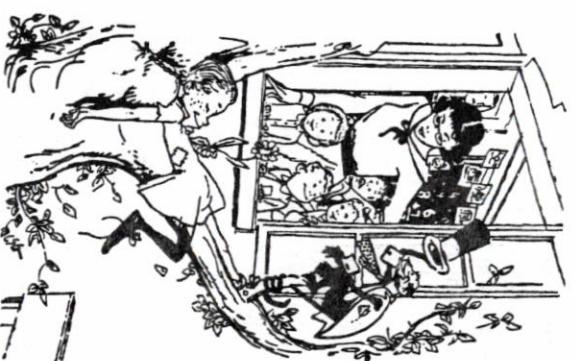
would get physically ill before every day. I got called "Pat" a lot, like the Saturday Night Live character. I remember also that I had a swim class with my girlfriend and sometimes the others would yell at us "Dykes go home!" and "Lezzies go home!" One time they threw rocks at us. I never got beat up though, I think because they were scared of me and my punk rock friends.

The administration dealt with me differently. I was out about my sexuality in junior high too, and the two schools were right next to each other. They shared a library, they were literally a few feet away from one another. The administration at my junior high told me I wasn't allowed to touch or hug any of my female friends because it was distracting to others. They also said that about me having blue hair, and that they would suspend me for causing a "distraction." But the high school administration was slicker. They never directly said we don't want you here because you are queer, but the administration and one or two other teachers I had would just never stop the other students from harassing me, even if it was right in front of them.

What was your life like after you dropped out of school?

When I dropped out, I kind of felt like my life was over. I had never intended to do that. I have a brother who was a high school drop out too, and I never wanted to be like him because I saw how much it upset my parents. After I dropped out my dad wrote me this letter saying that I had just ruined my whole life and what a fuck up I was. My stepfather and my mother were really understanding and really helpful to me at that time though. Her support was the best thing. She says now that she knew something was wrong and that she just wanted to do anything to make me happy again. I don't remember my girlfriend being 100% supportive. It was hard for me not to be embarrassed about my decision at first, all of my friends were these super over achievers and I was an above average student myself. And then I just quit. I thought that they would think I was crazy, but they still liked me and I still hung out with them.

When I had just stopped going to school, which was about 3 or 4



I didn't go to school today...
and I don't think I'll go tomorrow

"We don't have to feel like our lives are over if we drop out. Our lives are just beginning and we simply have to find our place. Once we can do that then we can live. Be proud of who you are, not ashamed of what you've done. We all have to make decisions in our lives the difference is making that decision and knowing that it is the right one. We control the direction of our lives so our success comes from within us. Do you feel like you can make it? Or do you feel like you're a failure? To be a failure is not to have failed but simply to not know how to succeed. We can't all do things on our own. So seek out the help that is needed and use it so that you can succeed."

Being Queer in High School

An interview with Katrina Hendry

Katrina, 23, is an amazing cook and poet from Florida. She currently lives in upstate New York where she is finishing her studies at the Culinary Institute of America and hopes to open her own vegetarian restaurant someday. This interview was conducted via email in the Summer of 1999.

How old were you when you dropped out of high school? What kinds of things were going on for you in your life at the time?

I was 15 when I stopped going to school, and 16 when I officially dropped out since that was the legal age in Florida for someone to drop out. At that time you couldn't get your driver's license till you turned 18 or until you had your GED, if you weren't in school.

I was going through some serious teen angst. That, and I was going through a terrible depression because I was starting to have flashbacks of sexual abuse that I had gone through as a child. This was causing some turmoil in my relationship that I'd had for 2.5 years as well. Basically, I went from an A-B student to a D-F student in a few months. No one was helping me. But I also wasn't telling anyone about what was going on. I was seeing a therapist, but my mother was telling her that I was going because I was having problems with being gay, which was not the case. I was having problems coping with rage and wanting to hurt other people, and myself. I wasn't getting what I needed. I just stopped caring about school. I was sick a lot that year too. It seemed like no one cared about what was going on. I needed help, and I wasn't getting it.

What was it like being "out" about being gay in high school?

I was a little punk rock dyke. The administration hated that, not to mention a few athletes and other people at my school who hated that too. They hated that I was so androgynous. I had a drama class that I literally

yourself in there, and you've shown that you are reliable, and have shown that you really care—that's all going to matter much more to the people who are hiring than any degree.

You know, I'm not saying that just because it worked for me it's going to work for everyone, because that's bullshit. In a lot of ways I feel like I'm an exception to the rule, or an accident. I worked really hard to get myself to where I could feel like I was giving something back.

Another concern and misconception about dropping out of school is that you will become lazy. What do you think about that? What was your experience?

Like I said, for me it was pretty much simultaneous when I was leaving school and moving out of my parents' house. So, I really had no choice but to get myself going to support myself financially.

I believe that how you use your time is a choice that a person has to make and that only that person can make. It's an overwhelming thing to have a lot of time to yourself all the sudden, for you to be the one to plan your day. It's entirely up to you if you're going to lay in front of the TV and veg out in front of soaps or if you're going to say "I'm going to make myself a little plan here to make myself a little more productive." It doesn't have to be so rigid. Even if you're doing one thing a day for yourself, or making one phone call, that's productivity. Although an outsider might look and say "Oh, you're being a bum," if you feel good about yourself and what you're doing then you don't have to answer to anybody! It's your life! Build it!

What would you say to some one who was thinking of dropping out?

Well, I know that there are other people who have done what I've done out there, but it's pretty rare. It's rare that people admit it. I think a lot of people feel ashamed of their background. I did for a long time. I never in a million years would have told anybody that I had dropped out in 11th grade because my family was a mess and I felt like I needed to leave home. That's not something that people go broadcasting proudly. I used to regret it, but now I don't regret it at all. I realize that these are things that were supposed to happen. It builds your character in a way.

I would say hang in there, and try to work your situation out. But if you can't, start to explore options to strengthen your self when you're outside of that home life you're in now where you have support systems. Don't ever be ashamed to take any old job. Don't feel like you're going to get some great thing handed to you right away, because you're not. It's going to be a bit of a struggle. But find people that will help you along the way! We're out here, you just need to find us!



When School Gets in the Way of Your Education

An interview with Jamar Ralford

Jamar is an entrepreneur who works at the Nehemiah Youth Mission in Philadelphia (901 S. 49th St., 215-729-4912.) NYM offers training in youth leadership skills and entrepreneurship for young people in grades 8-12. They also provide teen clubs for grades 5-8. They run youth operated businesses: a silk screen shop and a mini print shop called I.Y.E.

Jamar Ralford dropped out of high school in the middle of 9th grade. His parents and the Department of Human Services had him put in a boarding school, which he didn't mind. After a year, he was sent back to Barrtram High School and dropped out again. Jamar's family always had fears about his future as a dropout. However, he didn't let that stop him because he had a different plan for his life as an entrepreneur. He began setting up his own businesses at age 8, among other things selling candy in school and trading baseball cards. He didn't feel challenged by school, so often after finishing his schoolwork he would turn to his own interests, like reading a magazine. Because this was seen as distraction from "learning", Jamar started getting bad grades, though he did just fine as far as schoolwork and tests.

"We should all teach ourselves," says Jamar, "School doesn't teach you, really, we know that in the city of Philadelphia. You have to go to the library and find the books to teach yourself. I used to take textbooks home from school at night. I wasn't allowed to because there are only so many to go around, but I would anyway."

What was the most difficult thing for you about dropping out?

Jamar says that the most difficult thing for him was dealing with his family's fears. "You want to please them, but you also want to do the right thing for yourself." His family warned him that he'd never be successful if he left school, that he'd be working at places like McDonald's flipping burgers

his whole life. But he was determined to start his own businesses, and since school wasn't working for him, he dropped out.

But isn't it hard for dropouts to get a job?

"Dropping out and not being able to get a job is baloney. Regardless of whether you're a dropout or finish high school or whatever, you're always going to have a hard time getting a job. Look at the Welfare-To-Work program! They can't find enough jobs, and none of the jobs pay enough to raise a family!"

What would you tell someone who was thinking of dropping out?

"Well, NYM encourages kids to stay in school, and I wouldn't tell someone to drop out. I'd say to them, make sure it's the right decision for you. Figure out before you leave what you will do afterwards. You won't be able to hang out with your friends between the hours of 8-5."

"Personally, I was worried that it would be hard to know where I fit into the world. I was asking myself questions like, 'What should I be doing? What is my place now?' When you're young, your place is being a student but after dropping out that suddenly changes." Jamar has found his place with the help of the staff at Nehemiah Youth Mission. He's been involved with NYM since 1992, before he dropped out, and has been a staff member there for over a year. He believes that through his work there as a volunteer he can accomplish anything, and help other young people with similar goals. "We all need someone for support and finding that at NYM was a big help. No matter how much they disagreed with what I had done they stuck with me and helped me through. Now they encourage me to take college courses even if it's only one course."

At NYM, Jamar does work often reserved for college graduates. He teaches young people how to start up their own businesses, he develops a curriculum for the youth mission, he's learning website design and he's about to start a "Teen Magazine." Jamar says that the other Teen Magazine of the same name is all about celebrities and offers nothing that could help young people. His vision for a teen magazine is a collection of teen success stories, written by and for youth. He also works on networking, marketing research, and is planning the annual Youth Conference for May 2000. This year's theme will be "Empowering a New Nation for a New World." To plan the conference he sets up media contacts, gets different bands to sign on to play, and organizes a planning committee. NYM also offers leadership training and development, and works with youth to speak about issues that the young people feel need to be brought up. In addition, Jamar runs a silk-screen printshop and a photocopy shop under NYM.